

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION IN ANGOLA: HOW STUDENT TEACHERS PERCEIVE THE PRACTICUM

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Abstract

Pre-service teacher education is a major political priority in Angola so as to promote educational and social development in the country. Pedagogical supervision is understood as a strategy that should support innovation towards better teacher qualification and more learning-centred curricula. However, there is a lack of studies about how teacher education programmes are perceived by both students and teacher educators. The study here reported is part of a PhD project conducted by the first author in a teacher training institution (Namibe Teacher Training School – Angola), focusing on perceptions of the practicum through survey questionnaires administered to student teachers, school supervisors, institutional supervisors and programme/ practicum coordinators across nine teacher education programmes. We will focus on the student teachers' views of the practicum as regards the goals and practices of supervision, the supervisor profile, the quality of educational practices at school, and the development of professional competences. Results point out mismatches between student teachers' ideal conceptions of the practicum (what they believe to be more important) and the way they experience it (what they perceive to be more present in practice). Those mismatches may generate dissatisfaction as regards the fulfilment of student teachers' expectations and indicate the need to improve teacher development practices in this context. The gap between ideals and reality can be partially understood with reference to constraints and improvement measures pointed out by the student teachers as regards school conditions (e.g. large classes, student misbehaviour and learning problems, shortage of resources), insufficient previous training to face the practicum, supervisors' lack of updated knowledge about supervisory strategies and educational innovation, and lack of appropriate communication and coordination between schools and the teacher training institution. These problems are also pointed out by the other participants in the study, which reinforces the need to undertake changes in this context. It is expected that this kind of studies may instigate institutions to discuss the role of practicum experiences as regards teacher qualification and educational change, not only in terms of what should be done but also in terms of how student teachers and teacher educators perceive reality as compared to their aspirations, thus taking into account their voices as a springboard for reflection and change.

Keywords: Pre-service teacher education, practicum, supervision, student teachers' perceptions.

1 INTRODUCTION: THE PRACTICUM IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

Improving teaching and learning is a major goal of educational agendas worldwide, and the practicum has been understood as a crucial curricular component of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes, allowing student teachers to link theory and practice, develop professional competences, and eventually contribute to innovation in schools. However, practicum arrangements, rationales and strategies vary a lot according to historical and organizational factors, (trans)national and institutional policies, and teacher educators' understandings of teaching and teacher education ([1], [2], [3], [4], [5]).

Two basic orientations regarding professional practice have been underlined in the literature, one based on a positivistic epistemology that sees teachers mostly as consumers of knowledge and implementers of external regulations and pre-designed programmes, and another one based on a praxeological epistemology that sees teachers as reflective practitioners, producers of knowledge and agents of change ([6], [7], [8], [9], [10]). These orientations are, however, often combined in practicum settings, since ITE programmes need to respond to existing circumstances and demands while seeking to instigate innovation in line with developments in educational theory. Even though theoretical proposals recommend that pedagogical supervision should be developmental, dialogic and reflective ([11], [12], [13], [14], [15]), supervisors often combine directive and empowering approaches in seeking to integrate student teachers within existing teaching cultures while improving their autonomy and ability to enact educational change. Moreover, situational constraints may reduce the

scope and impact of their action, especially when they do not have adequate training to become supervisors.

The quality of the practicum in ITE programs is a political, organizational and theoretical issue, but also a moral issue as it depends on the values, beliefs and aspirations of participants. Their views of schooling and teacher education as well as their perceptions of the practicum have a deep influence on their practice and its outcomes. Therefore, researching the practicum from the participants' perspective has become one of the main strategies to understand how it operates in particular settings ([2], [4]). This is all the more important in countries where ITE is an underdeveloped field and where research on ITE is scarce. This is the case of Angola, a country with high levels of illiteracy, social inequalities and poverty, where the quality of schooling and teacher education has been a priority of educational policies ([16], [17]), especially given the shortage of qualified teachers, educational resources and pre/in-service programmes that respond to school needs, as pointed out in official reports and strategic plans ([18], [19], [20], [21], [22], [23]).

Despite educational reforms and policies, the gap between normative discourses and practice is still very high in the country. A few studies undertaken in ITE institutions have highlighted shortcomings of ITE programmes, namely the existence of fragmented curricula and a technical view of teaching, the gap between theory and practice and between educational policies and training models, the lack of qualified supervisors, and the low impact on school change ([24], [25]). Even though these kind of problems affect ITE worldwide, they become particularly important in countries where the low level of literacy among the population directly affects social, cultural and economic development. Collecting participants' perceptions on ITE in these contexts may provide invaluable data on the basis of which collective reflection can take place, involving all stakeholders in analysing constraints so as to devise context-sensitive, realistic strategies to overcome them.

One of the areas that has deserved attention in educational policies and official reports is pedagogical supervision, understood as a counselling activity aimed at improving education on the basis of self-reflection and self-evaluation, requiring the specialised training of supervisors ([18], [19]). Supervision is the main focus of the present research, carried out in an ITE institution in Angola (Namibe) with a focus on participants' perceptions regarding various components of the practicum experience. Although the study included survey questionnaires administered to four groups of participants across nine teacher education programmes – student teachers, school supervisors, institutional supervisors, and programme/ practicum coordinators –, in this paper we will focus primarily on the student teachers' perceptions regarding the goals and practices of supervision, the supervisor profile, educational practices at school, professional competence development, constraints affecting the practicum, and improvement measures. The rather wide scope of inquiry was intended to cover important facets of the practicum in a context where no previous research on ITE programmes has been undertaken, aiming at providing a descriptive account of participants' views and contributing to future developments in the institution. Even though results refer to a particular case, they may resonate with and be useful in similar institutional contexts, namely due to the general lack of research about practicum experiences.

2 METHODOLOGY

The results here reported are part of a larger PhD project conducted by the first author and supervised by the second author. The study focuses on the practicum in nine ITE programmes of Patrice Lumumba Teacher Training School, situated in the province of Namibe in Angola. This type of ITE institutions are not part of the higher education system, where ITE also takes place. They offer four-year programmes that prepare teachers from pre-school education up to grade 9. Students who attend these programmes have a background of nine schooling years in primary and secondary education, that is, their preparation to become teachers takes place from grades 10 to 13. ITE in higher education institutions is aimed at students with a background of twelve schooling years who can then teach higher grades in secondary schools.

The curricula of ITE programmes in Patrice Lumumba School include subject-specific and educational training, including didactics. The practicum takes place in grade 13 along with other courses, during one year, with the supervision of a school teacher and a teacher educator from the training institution. Teaching occurs in the school supervisors' classes. School supervisors are expected to observe all the lessons taught by student teachers and institutional supervisors are expected to observe five lessons per student teacher each trimester, although the fact that they often supervise large groups of students may affect their ability to cope with their role responsibilities. Lesson preparation, observation

and analysis is expected to be done with the support of both supervisors, and student teachers must produce a final practicum report. Although there is an institutional Regulation for the practicum, pedagogical supervision is not yet a consolidated practice and there are ambiguities regarding its nature and the supervisors' roles, which is aggravated by the fact that most supervisors have no specialised training. Concerns regarding the quality of the practicum have been voiced in the institution, therefore the study was well accepted by its directive board, which assisted the main researcher in arranging meetings with all the practicum participants to present the project, ask for their collaboration, and collect data. The fact that she had worked in the institution as a teacher educator for four years also facilitated the conduction of research.

The research was designed as a descriptive case study with three objectives: (1) To describe the participants' perceptions regarding supervision in the practicum; (2) To identify good supervision practices and the factors that enable them; (3) To identify the participants' views regarding practicum constraints and improvement measures. Data collection was done in 2014 by the end of the school year, through survey questionnaires administered to four groups of participants across the nine ITE programmes: student teachers (STs) (n=399), school supervisors (SSs) (n=105), institutional supervisors (ISs) (n=56), and programme/ practicum coordinators (PCs) (n=15). The questionnaire to the coordinators was open-ended and focused mostly on coordination issues. As for the questionnaires to the other three groups, they were mostly composed by closed questions and had a similar content and structure so as to facilitate the triangulation of voices. They were previously piloted in another similar institution with a small group of subjects, and administered directly to participants by the main researcher. All questionnaires were anonymous and included an initial section for collecting personal and professional data so as to characterise participants. Descriptive statistical analysis (SPSS) was applied to data from closed questions and content analysis was used for summarising responses to open questions.

The nine ITE programmes had a total of 518 STs and the response rate was 77% (n=399). The respondents were distributed across those programmes as follows: Primary School Education (13.0%), Physical Education (6.5%); Art Education (7.5%); Biology-Chemistry (18.3%); Mathematics-Physics (14.3%); Geography-History (17.3%); Portuguese (11.5%), English (6.3%); and French (5.3%). Gender distribution was quite even (53.2% male and 46.8% female), and ages ranged from 17 to 55 with an average of 22 years old. About one third of the STs (30.7%) were working students and only 7.6% had previous teaching experience.

In this paper we focus primarily on STs' perceptions of supervision in the practicum. The results relate to topics corresponding to different questionnaire sections: 1. Supervision purposes; 2. Supervision tasks; 3. Supervisor profile; 4. School practices; 5. Professional competences; 6. Practicum problems; 7. Improvement measures. In topics 1-5, STs were asked to rate the *importance* given to aspects defined for each topic, on a 4-point scale (No Opinion, Not Important, Important, Very Important) that was also converted into a numerical scale from 0-3 so as to calculate mean values (0-No Opinion, 1-Not Important, 2-Important, 3-Very Important). Within these topics, STs were further asked to indicate those aspects found to be *more present* in their practicum experience, which allowed a comparison between importance and presence, and therefore the identification of (mis)matches between *ideal views of the practicum* (what is perceived to be *very important*) and *views of practicum reality* (what is perceived to be *more present*). In topic 6 STs had to indicate problems that were *more serious* from a list of twenty-four constraining factors that may affect the quality of the practicum, related to school conditions, supervisors and student teachers. In topic 7 they were asked to propose a maximum of four improvement measures (open question).

3 RESULTS

In the following sub-sections, results for topics 1-5 account for the STs' perceptions of what they consider to be important (ideal perspectives) and what they find to be more present in their personal practicum experience. Tables 1-5, related with supervision purposes and tasks, the supervisor profile, school practices and professional competences, present the questionnaire items, mean values of importance (calculated from 0 to 3), the percentage of STs who considered them *very important* and *more present* in their experience, and the mismatch between *very important* and *more present* items (the difference between percentage values). Table 6 compares the STs' perspectives on constraints affecting the practicum with the perspectives of institutional supervisors and school supervisors. All percentage values were calculated from the total of responses.

3.1 Purposes and tasks of supervision

The questionnaire included a set of eight general purposes of supervision often mentioned in the literature, related to integration into school cultures, support to professional development and autonomy, promotion of educational innovation, and teacher assessment. Table 1 presents the STs' perceptions regarding these purposes, ordered according to mean values.

Table 1. Purposes of supervision (n=399).

<i>Purposes of supervision</i>	Importance		More Present	Mismatch
	\bar{x}	Very Important		
Assess the STs' performance	2.72	77.1	65.2	11.9
Support STs in pedagogical problem solving	2.45	62.8	37.6	25.2
Provide STs with good teaching models	2.35	58.1	28.8	29.3
Help STs analyse pedagogical practice	2.27	47.0	41.4	5.6
Promote innovation of pedagogical practice in schools	2.13	42.3	20.1	22.2
Help STs develop their own teaching style	2.13	44.3	24.3	20.0
Promote STs' professional autonomy	1.95	39.5	22.8	16.7
Integrate STs into the school culture	1.79	28.7	23.3	5.4

STs: Student teachers

Mean values indicate that most purposes are viewed as important or very important, which suggests an understanding of supervision as a multifunctional activity. Nevertheless, they are not perceived as being very present in STs' experience, with the exception of teacher assessment (65.2%) and, to a lesser degree, teacher support in the analysis of teaching (41.4%). Actually, the analysis of teaching in post-observation sessions is usually associated with assessment as supervisors are expected to use an observation checklist to analyse and assess lessons. As for the role of supervision in helping STs develop their own teaching style and autonomy, it is perceived in practice by a small portion of the group (24.3% and 22.8% respectively). These results suggest that supervision tends to be experienced as a controlling rather than an empowering activity, which runs counter to current perspectives advocating collaborative supervision towards teacher autonomy ([12], [13], [14], [15]). The mismatch between importance and presence is more evident in two supervision purposes – supporting STs in pedagogical problem solving (25,2%) and providing them with good teaching models (29,3). Is is also worth pointing out that the integration of STs into school cultures is one of the least valued and least present aspects of supervision, which appears to suggest that the practicum operates in isolation from those cultures, an issue that may have implications on preparing teachers for the workplace and developing their professional identity, which are two major roles of practicum experiences [2].

Supervision purposes cannot be dissociated from supervision tasks. The questionnaire included five tasks related to those purposes: clinical supervision cycles (planning-observation-analysis of practice), use of reflective strategies that facilitate pedagogical change, promotion of innovation and learning, formative assessment of teacher performance and progress, and support seminars for practicum participants. STs' perceptions presented in Table 2 are ordered according to mean values.

Table 2. Tasks of supervision (n=399).

<i>Tasks of supervision</i>	Importance		More Present	Mismatch
	\bar{x}	Very Important		
Seminars for STs, SSs and ISs about pedagogical topics of interest	2.54	70.9	49.9	21.0
Cycles of lesson planning-observation-analysis with the support of ISs and SSs	2.53	73.4	46.9	26.5
On-going formative evaluation of STs' performance and progress with their active participation (self-evaluation)	2.36	57.1	39.3	17.8
Development of innovative intervention plans oriented to problem solving and the improvement of learning	2.27	46.7	28.3	18.4
Strategies that foster reflection for pedagogical change (observation schedules, teaching journals, research...)	1.85	31.6	18.0	13.6

STs: Student teachers / ISs: Institutional supervisors

Mean values indicate that STs value these tasks, although there is a higher mismatch between ideal views and perceived practice in two of them: the organization of pedagogical seminars for practicum participants (21.0%) and the development of clinical supervision cycles (26.5%), which are also the most valued tasks. The other tasks are not perceived as being very present, the least present being the use of reflective strategies that promote reflection and change, like observation, teaching journals and pedagogical inquiry (18.0%). Although formative (self-)assessment is considered to be very important by 57.1% of the STs, it requires the use of reflective strategies as well as on-going supervision cycles, which are aspects that are perceived as not being very present by a large number of respondents. If we compare the perceived presence of formative assessment (39,3%) with that of teacher assessment in Table 1 above (65,2%), we can infer that assessment is understood mostly as external assessment undertaken by supervisors, which may affect the development of personal teaching styles and professional autonomy. Finally, innovation does not seem to be very encouraged from the STs' point of view, which appears to reinforce their perception that it is not a major purpose of supervision practices (cf. Table 1).

3.2 Supervisor profile

The quality of teacher development depends largely on the quality of teacher educators, and supervisors as teachers of teaching need to have professional competences related to both teaching and supervision [26]. The questionnaire listed fourteen features of the supervisor profile and the results were organized into three groups as presented in Table 3: attitudes, knowledge and skills. In each group, results are ordered according to mean values.

Table 3. Supervisor profile (n=399).

Supervisor profile	Importance		More Present	Mismatch
	\bar{x}	Very Important		
Professional attitudes				
Love for teaching	2.70	81.4	54.6	26.8
Reflective stance	2.25	47.6	31.3	16.3
Openness to innovation	1.89	34.5	18.0	16.5
Professional knowledge				
Subject-matter knowledge	2.59	76.0	42.6	33.4
Didactic knowledge	2.37	62.5	32.3	30.2
Knowledge about teacher education and supervision	2.00	33.2	17.3	15.9

<i>Professional skills</i>				
Ability to assess with justice	2.60	74.1	43.1	31.0
Ability to dialogue, collaborate and support	2.52	71.4	52.6	18.8
Ability to plan and evaluate teaching	2.48	63.7	38.8	24.9
Ability to identify and solve problems	2.27	48.0	35.6	12.4
Ability to observe and interpret data from observation	2.19	43.4	33.1	10.3
Ability to help build teaching materials	2.08	39.3	20.8	18.5
Disposition for self-training and professional development	2.04	41.2	22.8	18.4
Ability to relate with others and solve conflict	1.97	34.9	27.3	7.6

STs' answers, referring to both school and institutional supervisors, indicate that all features are valued as important or very important (see mean values), accounting for a multidimensional representation of the supervisor profile, which is aligned with a view of supervision as a multi-purpose activity (cf. Table 1). However, there are gaps between what they consider to be very important and what they perceive to be more evident in their own supervisors. As regards professional attitudes, love for teaching is where the gap between high importance (81.4%) and high presence (54.6%) is especially significant (26.8%), although the other two attitudes – reflective mind and openness to innovation – are perceived by most STs as not being very present in practice, and openness to innovation is less valued than other attitudes. These results somehow reinforce the idea that reflection and innovation may not be a priority in the practicum. Supervisors' professional knowledge is also an area of concern, since both subject-matter and didactic knowledge are highly valued but not perceived as very present by the majority of the STs, and knowledge about teacher education and supervision is less valued and also not very present in practice (17.3%). As regards professional skills, STs' responses indicate a significant mismatch between ideal perspectives and lived experience in relation to supervisors' ability to plan and evaluate teaching (24.9%) and the ability to be fair in assessments of teaching performance (31.0%), which cannot be dissociated from supervisors' professional knowledge. Previous results suggested that assessment is mostly understood as being the supervisors' responsibility rather than the result of STs' involvement in formative (self-)assessment, which can be partially explain why fairness is perceived to be lacking by more than half of the STs. Previous results also indicated some lack of systematic reflection on practice through supervision cycles of lesson planning, observation and analysis, which can be associated with shortcomings identified in the supervisors' profile as regards having a reflective mind, knowing about teacher education and supervision, and being able to plan and evaluate teaching, identify and solve problems, build didactic materials, observe lessons and interpret data from lesson observation. These features of the supervisor profile are considered to be very present in practice by a rather low number of STs (about one third or less). Supervisors' disposition for self-training and professional development is valued by STs but only 22.8% acknowledge it as an especially evident feature of their own supervisors. It needs to be said that there are not enough in-service training opportunities in the country. According to data collected in the supervisors' questionnaires, only 42.9% of the institutional supervisors (n=56) and 24.8% of the school supervisors (n=105) declared to have done some training in pedagogical supervision. The lack of specialised training for supervisors and teacher educators in general is an issue pointed out in the literature, and it has to do with the instability of the supervisors' position (no job continuity) and ambiguities regarding their profile both in teacher training institutions and schools ([26], [27]).

3.3 Teaching practices and professional competence development

Practicum experiences depend on conceptions of teaching. The questionnaire included a section on various facets of teaching, and the results were organised into four groups as presented in Table 4: contents, activities and materials, support to learning and learning how to learn, and assessment of learning and teaching. STs were asked to indicate their importance for the quality of teaching and signal those that were more explored/ discussed with supervisors in lesson planning, observation and analysis. The results are ordered according to mean values in each group of items.

Table 4. Teaching practices (n=399).

Teaching practices	Importance		More Present	Mismatch
	\bar{x}	Very Important		
Contents				
Clear exposure of contents	2.59	73.6	57.9	15.7
Selection of relevant contents	2.22	52.0	46.9	5.1
Activities and materials				
Adequacy of activities and materials to students' level	2.44	62.1	38.9	23.2
Good class time/ space management	2.32	52.8	53.1	-0.3
Adequacy of activities and materials to students' interests	2.15	45.5	25.3	20.2
Support to learning and learning how to learn				
Support to student learning	2.36	58.2	37.3	20.9
Promotion of study habits and learning strategies	2.09	41.3	24.6	16.7
Promotion of citizenship values	1.86	33.8	16.8	17.0
Assessment of learning and teaching				
Assessment and improvement of teaching	2.42	63.8	37.8	26.0
Fair assessment of students' learning	2.35	60.4	37.3	23.1
Promotion of students' self-evaluation skills	2.07	37.0	21.8	15.2

Again, all aspects are considered important or very important by most STs (see mean values). The aspects that are considered very important by at least 60% of the STs are clear exposure of contents, adequacy of activities and materials to students' level, fair assessment of students' learning, and assessment and improvement of teaching, which are relevant pedagogical concerns. However, there is a mismatch higher than 20% between importance and presence in all these aspects except for the clear exposure of contents, which is also the aspect whose presence is higher, followed by the selection of relevant contents and time/ space management. These three aspects appear to be those that are more explored in supervision conferences according to the STs' perceptions, which suggests a major focus on content delivery and class management issues. On the other hand, the aspects that seem to be more overlooked, with less than 25% of the STs acknowledging that they are very present in supervision discussions, are all related to learning-centred teaching: adequacy of activities and materials to students' interests, promotion of study habits and learning strategies, promotion of students' self-evaluation skills, and promotion of citizenship values. These results suggest that the practicum does not encourage the development of learner-centred approaches. It needs to be noted that classes are usually very large (with around 50 students), which is an important constraint to learner-centredness.

The questionnaire also asked STs about professional competences as regards their importance and their presence in their own professional development. Table 5 presents the results organised into three groups: planning competences, teaching competences, and reflective competences. The results are ordered according to mean values in each group of items.

Table 5. Development of professional competences (n=399).

Professional competences in the practicum	Importance		More Present	Mismatch
	\bar{x}	Very Important		
Planning - Ability to:				
Plan units/ lessons	2.58	70.6	52.1	18.5
Analyse and manage the national syllabus	2.47	63.7	46.6	17.1
Analyse and use the textbook	2.33	52.1	46.9	5.2
Adapt and develop didactic materials	2.08	40.2	24.8	15.4
Teaching - Ability to:				
Communicate with students and promote participation	2.50	66.9	53.8	13.1
Explore new methodologies	2.48	62.9	38.1	24.8
Assess student learning	2.48	63.3	45.6	17.7
Keep student discipline in class	2.31	55.1	41.4	13.7
Act in problematic, unpredicted/ uncertain situations	2.22	48.9	34.3	14.6
Reflection - Ability to:				
Work in teams with other colleagues/ teachers	2.51	66.5	49.1	17.4
Reflect about practice	2.11	36.9	28.1	8.8
Readjust/ innovate practice	2.06	42.6	24.1	18.5

All the competences are highly valued even though STs' feel that some are more developed than others in their practicum. Those that are perceived to be more developed by at least 45% of the STs are related to planning (except for adapting and developing didactic materials), communicating with students and promoting their participation, assessing learning, and working with peers. As for the competences that are perceived as being least developed, they relate to the adaptation and development of didactic materials (24.8%), reflection about practice (28.1%), and the ability readjust/innovate practice (24.1%). The exploration of new methodologies is the aspect where the mismatch between importance and presence is higher (24.8%). As concluded in previous sections, reflection and innovation do not appear to be a priority in the practicum, even though they are considered important or very important by the vast majority of the STs.

3.4 Practicum problems and improvement measures

This last section focuses on the perceptions of supervisors and student teachers regarding major constraints affecting the practicum and improvement measures needed to surpass them. The questionnaire presented a list of twenty-four potential problems related with school conditions, supervisors and student teachers, and participants had to mark those that most seriously affect the quality of the practicum. They were also asked to point out up to four measures needed to improve the quality of practicum experiences (open question).

All problems were signalled by participants, but some were more signalled than others. Table 6 presents the eighteen problems that were indicated by at least 40% of the total number of participants (n=560). The results were organised into three groups – problems related with schools, the supervisors, and the student teachers – and they are ordered according to total values (last column) in each group.

Table 6. Practicum problems (n=560).

	ISs n=56	SSs n=105	STs n=399	Total n=560
<i>Practicum problems (considered to be serious)</i>				
<i>Schools</i>				
Few didactic materials to support teaching	66.1	60.0	63.9	63.4
Students with a lot of behaviour problems (lack of discipline)	33.9	50.5	57.1	53.6
Students with a lot of learning difficulties	50.0	46.7	55.4	53.2
Students with very low motivation to learn	39.3	41.9	56.5	52.0
Classes with too many students	62.5	38.1	53.6	51.6
Low recognition of STs' competences in school	28.6	21.9	49.1	42.0
<i>Supervisors</i>				
Lack of coordination and communication between ISs and SSs	42.9	54.3	63.4	59.6
Lack of training from SSs on supervision strategies	71.4	54.3	55.6	57.0
Lack of training from ISs on innovative teaching strategies	37.5	49.5	53.1	50.9
Lack of training from SSs on innovative teaching strategies	53.6	49.5	50.9	50.9
High number of STs per IS	60.7	41.9	50.6	50.0
Lack of training from ISs on supervision strategies	37.5	43.8	49.9	47.5
Assessment practices not very formative, with no participation of STs	30.4	36.2	43.5	40.7
<i>Student teachers</i>				
Insufficient previous scientific preparation	71.4	60.0	60.2	61.3
Lack of motivation for teaching	50.0	53.3	49.1	50.0
Little time to dedicate themselves to the practicum	41.1	45.7	47.6	46.6
Insufficient previous pedagogical preparation	50.0	45.7	43.9	44.8
Difficulties in reflecting about practice	46.4	40.0	41.6	41.8

ISs: Institutional supervisors / SSs: School supervisors / STs: Student teachers

The first conclusion to be drawn from this table is that there are not many discrepancies among the three groups, with the exception of five constraints where variations of around 20% can be observed, probably indicating differences of perspective and expectations: student misbehaviour, low recognition of STs' competences in school and lack of inter-institutional coordination/ communication are most felt by STs; the existence of large classes in schools and the high number of STs supervised by ISs are most felt by ISs. Many of the constraints pointed out by participants may help us understand some of the shortcomings identified in previous sections, namely the focus on the external assessment of teaching and the lack of reflection, innovation and learner-centredness, which may have to do with lack of supervisor training and school conditions, and also to limitations observed in the STs' preparation and commitment. Improvement measures proposed by the three groups reveal a strategic position towards constraints, pointing out the need to increase inter-institutional coordination/ communication, supervisor training, STs' previous preparation for the practicum, positive interpersonal relationships between supervisors and STs, support to teaching and reflection on practice, and formative assessment of teaching. These suggestions were reinforced by programme/ practicum coordinators, who also indicated constraints related with work overload, resistance to change, and difficulties in making everyone fulfil their role responsibilities. They believe that more dialogue and training, as well as better working conditions and resources, are needed to overcome perceived constraints and shortcomings.

4 CONCLUSION

Overall, STs have an ideal view of the practicum that is aligned with current theoretical developments. The aspects they value appear to be present in their experience to a certain extent, which suggests the existence of good supervision practices, but there are also gaps between ideal views and perceived practices, namely as regards the reflective orientation of supervision strategies, the development of supervision cycles, the promotion of learner-centred approaches and innovation, the use of formative assessment with ST involvement, and the development of teacher autonomy. Supervision appears to have a normative rather than a transformative role. Constraints regarding school contexts, inter-institutional relationships, supervisor training and student teachers' preparation for and commitment to practice are pointed out by participants, which may largely explain those gaps. Mismatches between *ideal views of the practicum* and *views of practicum reality* may cause dissatisfaction and affect the outcomes of professional development, and the improvement measures pointed out signal a strategic understanding of the practicum as a complex and problematic curricular space that needs attention from all stakeholders. Inter-institutional coordination and communication, along with supervisor training and the betterment of working conditions, appear to be needed in a context where ITE is acknowledged to be a crucial facet of educational, social and economic development.

The study points out the importance of investigating participants' views of ITE programmes as a way to raise institutional awareness of what may expand or reduce the quality of teacher development, as a basis for strategic action that responds to perceived expectations and needs. This requires institutions to build on research findings and promote internal reflection. This study was supported by the directive board of the training institution, and also embraced by the practicum participants who collaborated in it, which shows an interest in understanding and renewing practicum arrangements.

Many of the shortcomings and constraints identified in this study are also pointed out in national policies and official reports, as well as in previous studies in this context ([24], [25]) and international research reviews ([2], [4], [10], [5]). It is a widely acknowledged fact that the practical component of ITE programmes is crucial for the professional development of prospective teachers, yet it is also the most complex component of those programmes, entailing intra/inter-institutional coordination and an on-going negotiation of diverse rationales and procedures. The practicum can thus be conceptualised as a "third space" [28], a hybrid space where different ways of thinking, knowing and doing intersect so as to promote new understandings on the basis of which prospective teachers, along with their supervisors, can learn to better cope with the challenges of school education and develop their professional identity and expertise.

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